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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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UNCLE!! I'd wave a white flag, but who could see it with so much snow for a backdrop? Y'know there's a lot of snow on the ground when the neighborhood kids are making snow "forts" by digging out huge mounds of snow rather than adding snow. I have 2-3 "foxholes" dug out in my yard by my neighbor's kids - a defensive position against their bigger sister and next-door cousin across the street. Kids in winter - not much changes over the years!

So yes, we did get clobbered with snow this week - almost two feet in my neighborhood, plus the heavy winds and drifting. My two larger dogs have not even tried to do their business in the snow; I had to clear out the pen and a wide path from the back to the front, including the front path that we rarely use. And then I had to clean any residual snow from those areas for the chihuahua to dare venture outside! It's been a week from hell, or should I say, the Arctic! I took two days off this week for a mini-vacation, but I certainly didn't get a chance for any relaxation!

Wednesday was spent trying to keep up with the snowfall, and failing miserably. When I was done, after being out for a little more than an hour, there was already another 2-3 inches on the ground. I went into the house to dry out and rest up, and went back out a few hours later, shortly before the storm subsided. I went back out Thursday to clear out any additional snow and places where it drifted. Also spent some time pulling snow off of my front porch roof, and part of the roof of the garage. And then having to shovel up that snow! Went and did some errands (the roads were terrific!) and rested up. Today I finished those errands I didn't get done yesterday. I'm spent! I may get an opportunity to sleep in and get some rest on Saturday, but I'm not betting on it!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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[Editor’s note: Due to technical issues, there will not be a P.A.T. column this week. Stay tuned...]

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Nintendo 3DS May Be Fine For Kids!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   PSP2 Out This Christmas?
                                    Sony Sues PS3 Hackers!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
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AOA: Nintendo 3DS May Be Fine For Kids Under Six

As CES 2011 assumed control of the vertical and horizontal last week, the American Optometric Association quietly issued a press statement suggesting kids six and under can play Nintendo’s 3DS as long as their visual system is developing normally. The note comes on the heels of Nintendo America president Reggie Fils-Aime’s warning that "very young children" avoid viewing 3D images.

In fact the AOA suggests 3D devices like the 3DS may actually help in the hunt to uncover correctible visual disorders early in life.

It’s not enough to have 20/20 vision, says the AOA, highlighting related factors like eye alignment and uniform eye focusing power. Deficiencies in either of these can fatigue the eyes and inhibit 3D viewing, as well as causing "loss of place" when reading, reading comprehension reduction, and lead to "increased frustration at school," with commensurate performance declines.

Enter 3D movies, television, and Nintendo’s 3DS. If children experience "discomfort" while viewing 3D in these venues or have difficulty recognizing the 3D effect, the AOA believes it could help identify visual disorders that might otherwise go undetected. Disorders like: Eye misalignment, crossed eyes, eyes turned outward, significantly mismatched eye power, or farsightedness.

What’s that? A great disturbance in the doctor-patient ratio? As if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and /weren’t/ silenced? Is the Nintendo 3DS - due in Japan this February and the U.S. in March - about to trigger a rash of panicked parental eye checkups for marginally symptomatic kids?

Who knows, but the AOA disregards preliminary screenings at schools or in pediatricians’ offices, which it says "cannot substitute" for the

sort of "comprehensive eye exams" offered by optometrists to detect and treat visual problems.

Of Nintendo’s warning that kid under six shouldn’t use the 3DS in 3D mode, the AOA errs on the side of caution. Children should use devices like the 3DS in moderation, it says (common sense advice in any event), adding that even children younger than six should be able to use a device like the 3DS in 3D mode as long as their visual system is "developing normally."

Can 3D wreck your eyes? The jury’s still out. We’re early days on actionable scientific research. All we can do is be mindful of data already available and reasonably cautious, most of all with young children, who depend on us to know what’s safe and what’s not.

PSP2 Out This Christmas, PS3 In Your Pocket?

Hold onto your hype-detectors, all that chatter about the PlayStation Portable’s successor essentially being a portable PS3 may be true.

From the horse’s mouth, it seems. So says UK biz site MCV,claiming Sony plans to announce the PSP2’s holiday 2011 launch at a Tokyo press event on January 27.

Channeling developer jabber, MCV reports that Sony’s been teasing licensees about the devices capabilities, and that the company’s calling it "as powerful as the PlayStation 3."

Wait, really? A handheld PlayStation 3? Are they planning to ship the thing with aluminum gloves slathered in Arctic Silver 5 and juiced off a 250 watt power supply?

Who knows, but MCV’s sources put the device’s debut somewhere during the fourth quarter, possibly as early as October, and say it’ll have a high-definition screen (so 1280 x 720 pixels minimum). The current PSP has a 4.3 inch TFT LCD widescreen that displays 480 x 272 pixels, while Apple’s iPhone 4 runs at 960 x 640 pixels.

It’ll also reportedly include the twin-thumbstick controls long requested and rumored in the offing for the PSP’s official successor (sorry PSP Phone, it’s probably not you.

MCV adds that Sony’s pushing for "richer, more in-depth content" to distinguish it from the more casual-angled iPhone and Android app deluge.

Imagine: Twin-sticks for first-person shooter bliss. A PS2 emulator. Games like Final Fantasy XIII, Heavy Rain, God of War 3, and Gran Turismo 5 without compromises. (Hey, we can wish!)

Consider this Sony’s answer to Nintendo’s 3DS, also rumored to be a portable powerhouse, says MCV. The 3DS launches in Japan next month, followed by a US debut in (late, probably) March.

I guess we stand by, nonplussed, and hope whoever fed MCV this information wasn’t buzzed on amphetamines.

Sony Sues PS3 Hackers

Lawyers for Sony Computer Entertainment have asked a San Francisco District Court judge to block the release of code that would enable the "jailbreaking" of the Sony PlayStation 3.

SCEA filed suit against George Hotz (AKA "geohot") as well as "Bushing," Hector Martin Cantero, Sven Peter, and others alleged to be part of the FAIL0VERFLOW group of hackers that contributed to the release of the PlayStation 3's root key.

SCEA charged Hotz and the others with violations of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, plus breaches of California copyright law, breach of contract, and other violations. SCEA also asked the court for a temporary restraining order preventing the plaintiffs from posting any code, including the so-called Elliptic Curve Digital Signature Algorithm keys, encryption keys, dePKG firmware decrypter, or other tools.

Hotz published the documents on his Web site, but offered no public statement.

PS3News posted what the site alleged to be a statement from GeoHot via IRC:

"After reading the documents and consulting with my legal team, I have decided to repost the information and jailbreak," he said. "The [Temporary Restraining Order] is proposed, not signed. If the court signs off on the TRO, I will comply with the court's decision."

Cracking the trusted protection module at the heart of the PS3 would allow a user to install his own software on the machine, for whatever purpose he chose. SCEA argued that one purpose of the TPMs was to prevent users from playing illegally copied or pirated games. A second, SCEA said, was to ensure that the PS3 functions in a "safe and reliable manner".

SCEA argued that the FAIL0VERFLOW group's work "continued to encourage and induce others to engage in the same or similar circumvention of the TPMs in the PS3 system".

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Subpoenas Twitter Over WikiLeaks Supporters

Prosecutors investigating the disclosure of thousands of classified government documents by the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks have gone to court to demand the Twitter account activity of several people linked to the

organization, including its founder, Julian Assange, according to the group and a copy of a subpoena made public late Friday.

The subpoena is the first public evidence of a criminal investigation, announced last month by Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr., that has been urged on by members of Congress of both parties but is fraught with legal and political difficulties for the Obama administration. It was denounced by WikiLeaks, which has so far made public only about 1 percent of the quarter-million confidential diplomatic cables in its possession but has threatened to post them all on the Web if criminal charges are brought.

Dozens of Pentagon and State Department officials have worked for months to assess the damage done to American diplomatic and military operations by the disclosures. In recent weeks, Justice Department officials have been seeking a legal rationale for charging Mr. Assange with criminal behavior, including whether he had solicited leaks.

The move to get the information from five prominent figures tied to the group was revealed late Friday, when Birgitta Jonsdottir, a former WikiLeaks activist who is also a member of Iceland’s Parliament, received an e-mail notification from Twitter.

In the message, obtained by The New York Times, the company told her it had received a legal request for details regarding her account and warned that the company would have to respond unless the matter was resolved or "a motion to quash the legal process has been filed." The subpoena was attached.

The subpoena was issued by the United States attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia on Dec. 14 and asks for the complete account information of Pfc. Bradley Manning, the Army intelligence specialist awaiting a court martial under suspicion of leaking materials to WikiLeaks, as well as Ms. Jonsdottir, Mr. Assange and two computer programmers, Rop Gonggrijp and Jacob Appelbaum. The request covers addresses, screen names, telephone numbers and credit card and bank account numbers, but does not ask for the content of private messages sent using Twitter.

Some published reports in recent weeks have suggested that the Justice Department may have secretly impaneled a grand jury in the Eastern District of Virginia, which often handles national security cases, to take evidence in the WikiLeaks inquiry. But the subpoena, unsealed by a Jan. 5 court order at the request of Twitter’s lawyers, was not issued by a grand jury.

In Twitter messages, WikiLeaks confirmed the subpoena and suggested that Google and Facebook might also have been issued such legal demands. Officials for Facebook declined to comment, and Google did not immediately respond to an inquiry.

WikiLeaks suggested that the United States was hypocritical for promoting an "Internet Freedom" initiative and decrying Iran’sinterference with activists’ use of the Internet while pursuing a criminal investigation of the group’s activities.

A State Department spokesman, Philip J. Crowley, said that Internet freedom "has always coexisted with the rule of law" and "does not mean that the Internet can be used to harm others," such as people who might be at risk if they were identified in diplomatic cables that were made public.

Mr. Appelbaum wrote in his Twitter feed on Saturday that Twitter's lawyers had warned him against using or receiving private messages using the service. "Do not send me Direct Messages," he wrote. "My Twitter account contents have apparently been invited to the (presumably-Grand Jury) in Alexandria."

Jodi Olson, a spokeswoman for Twitter, said the company would not comment. But she said that "to help users protect their rights, it's our policy to notify users about law enforcement and governmental requests for their information, unless we are prevented by law from doing so."

Of the five individuals named in the subpoena, only two - Mr. Manning and Mr. Appelbaum - are American citizens. The others include an Australian, Mr. Assange; Ms. Jonsdottir, of Iceland; and Mr. Gonggrijp, a Dutch citizen. This raised the possibility of a diplomatic quarrel - other nations whose citizens are involved in such subpoenas could argue that American laws were being used to stifle free communications between individuals who were not Americans and who were not in the United States at the time of the messages.

Reached by telephone in Iceland, Ms. Jonsdottir said that she would be contesting the court action. She said that she had not exchanged sensitive information using her Twitter account, "but it's just the fact that another country would request this sort of personal information from an elected official without having any case against me."

Iceland's foreign minister, she said, has requested a meeting with the American ambassador to Iceland to ask, among other things, whether a grand jury inquiry prompted the subpoena.

"It is so sad," she said. "I have so many friends in the U.S., and there are so many things that I respect about it. This is not how America wants to present itself to the world."

Obama administration officials on Saturday indicated that the investigation was still in an early phase, with a broad net cast for evidence regarding WikiLeaks' interactions with Private Manning, 23, who has been held for months in a military detention center at Quantico, Va., on suspicion of being WikiLeaks' source for the classified military and diplomatic records.

The subpoena seeks Twitter account activity since Nov. 1, a few weeks before Private Manning is alleged to have started downloading documents from his military computer and giving them to WikiLeaks.

Glenn Greenwald, a lawyer and writer who posted the subpoena on his blog at Salon.com, suggested investigators may be focusing on the first of the disclosures of which Private Manning has been accused - a military video depicting two American helicopters in Iraq in 2007 firing at people on the ground who included two Reuters journalists, both of whom were killed. An edited version of the video listed Mr. Assange, Ms. Jonsdottir, and Mr. Gonggrijp as producers.

Leak prosecutions have been rare and have almost always focused on government employees who disclose classified information, not on journalists or others who publish it. In its first two years, the Obama administration has charged five current or former government employees for such leaks, a record.

But there has never been a successful prosecution of a nongovernment employee for disseminating classified information. Most legal experts believe that efforts to bring criminal charges against WikiLeaks

volunteers would face numerous practical and legal obstacles, and some human rights organizations and constitutional scholars have said such a prosecution could damage press freedom.

Technology and telecommunications companies receive thousands of subpoenas and court orders every year in which the authorities demand a broad range of information about their customers, from the content of their e-mails, to the Internet Protocol addresses of their computers, to their files that are stored online and location data from their cellphones.

The volume of requests has become so large, and the rules guarding personal information so patchy, that in March a coalition of Internet companies and communications carriers teamed up with civil liberties groups in an effort to lobby Congress. The coalition, Digital Due Process, wants to strengthen the privacy protections for online information and simplify the laws governing access to those records by law enforcement authorities.

WikiLeaks faced severe criticism after it posted military documents from the war in Afghanistan in July without removing the names of Afghan citizens who had assisted the United States. Since then, WikiLeaks has become far more cautious, stripping names out of Iraq war documents posted online and moving slowly in publishing the 251,287 diplomatic cables it obtained.

But Mr. Assange has posted an encrypted "insurance" file on several Web sites containing all or most of the unpublished cables and possibly other classified documents. Thousands of supporters around the world have downloaded the file, and Mr. Assange has suggested that if legal action is taken against him or the organization, he would release the encryption key and make the documents public.

"If something happens to us, the key parts will be released automatically," Mr. Assange said in an online interview with readers of The Guardian last month.

Twins’ Bid To Void Facebook Settlement Meets Doubt

Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss found a skeptical audience on Tuesday as they tried to persuade a U.S. appeals court to release them from a $65 million settlement over the founding of online social network Facebook.

The saga of the Winklevoss twins and Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg became silver screen lore with the release of the film "The Social Network" last year. It has long been a legal battle as well.

Should the case be revived, it could be a big headache for the fast-growing social networking firm, which has seen a frenzy of investor interest for its privately held shares and is being closely-watched for signs that it might eventually stage a blockbuster initial public offering.

The 6-foot, 5-inch (1.96-meter) brothers were hard to miss in the front row at the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on Tuesday. The two, Olympic rowers who participated in the 2008 games in Beijing, wore dark suits and listened quietly as a three-judge panel peppered their attorney with questions.

Zuckerberg did not attend the court hearing involving his former Harvard University classmates. In the movie, actor Armie Hammer played both identical twins, who Zuckerberg's character snidely referred to on-screen as the "Winklevi."

The twins, along with Divya Narendra, started a company called ConnectU while at Harvard. They say that Zuckerberg stole their idea. Facebook denies these claims.

The twins argue that based on an internal valuation that Facebook did not disclose, they should have received more Facebook shares as part of their 2008 settlement resolving their lawsuit. Facebook argues it was under no obligation to reveal an internal valuation.

Judge Barry Silverman asked why the twins' attorneys didn't press harder for the internal figure during settlement talks.

"Why didn't you ask about that at the time?" he said.

Winklevoss attorney Jerome Falk argued that Facebook had a legal duty to disclose the information. Facebook attorney E. Mark Rosenkranz disagreed.

"It's called due diligence because it's supposed to be diligent," Rosenkranz said.

He later added that "ConnectU's founders struck a deal that made them very, very rich, and that's making them richer by the day."

After the hearing, Cameron Winklevoss said they are looking forward to a decision.

"I just think it's in the hands of the court," he said.

Facebook has said in court filings that the Winklevoss twins "suffered a bout of settlers' remorse" after agreeing to the deal which had been valued at $65 million. A Facebook representative said via email on Tuesday that the company appreciates the court's time and also looks forward to a decision.

Facebook earned $355 million in net income and $1.2 billion of revenue in 2010's first nine months, according to documents that Goldman Sachs provided to clients last week to entice investors in a special fund set up to invest in the social networking giant.

A growing secondary market has developed for trading private shares of Facebook.

A federal trial court judge refused to allow the twins and Narendra to get out of the settlement. The ConnectU founders then asked the 9th Circuit to revive the lawsuit to its pre-settlement status.

Senior Judge J. Clifford Wallace pointed out on Tuesday that the twins had several lawyers representing them at settlement talks, and that their father was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

That makes it difficult to believe that anyone took advantage of them, Wallace said.

"I agree my clients were not behind the barn door when brains were passed out," Falk said.

Goldman Sachs and Russia's Digital Sky Technologies this month snagged a deal to invest up to $1.5 billion in Facebook, valuing the world's No. 1 social network at roughly $50 billion - exceeding the likes of Yahoo Inc and many other large, multinational companies.

Google Wins One Against Microsoft

Google Inc. won a key victory in a lawsuit against the U.S. Interior Department, two months after the Web giant accused the agency of improperly favoring rival
Microsoft Corp. in a contract bid to provide a new email system.

Google won a key ruling in its lawsuit against the Interior Department, two months after the Web giant accused the agency of improperly favoring Microsoft in a contract bid to provide a new email system.

Susan Braden, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., on Monday issued a preliminary injunction that prevents the Interior Department from deciding to use Microsoft's email and collaboration tools for its 88,000 employees as part of the federal government's move to Web-based applications software.

In an order unsealed late Tuesday in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, Judge Braden wrote that Google had made a preliminary showing that the agency "violated the Competition in Contracting Act," which was passed in 1984 to promote "full and open competitive procedures" for federal contract bids.

A spokesman for Google, which filed the suit in October of last year, said in a statement: "As a proponent of open competition on the Internet and in the technology sector in general, we're pleased with the court's decision."

A spokeswoman for the Interior Department, which includes the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, declined to comment. A Microsoft spokeswoman said, "The full record will demonstrate that this award is in the best interest of the government and taxpayers."

Google and its government-reselling partner Onix Networking Corp. had argued that the Interior Department's request for bids was written to exclude Google Apps by stating the system had to include the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite.

Judge Braden agreed, stating in her order that the agency's "failure to list Google's repeated express interest in this procurement cannot be explained as an oversight."

John H. Williamson, a government contracts lawyer at McGuireWoods LLP in Washington, D.C., said the decision "makes it very likely that Interior will take corrective action" and agree to seriously consider a Google software bid. The ruling is not a final result so the agency could still try to win the case over the next few weeks, but it faces an uphill climb and Judge Braden is unlikely to reverse her thinking, Mr. Williamson said.

Should the agency continue to fight the lawsuit, it could appeal any final decision by Judge Braden to a higher court.

Piracy and Counterfeit Goods Websites Generate 53 Billion Visits per Year

A sampling of only 22 brands revealed that websites offering pirated digital content and counterfeit goods generate more than 53 billion visits per year, according to a study released today by MarkMonitor.

Sites offering pirated digital content draw the lion s share of the 53 billion annual visits while sites selling counterfeit goods, including prescription drugs and luxury goods, generate more than 92 million visits per year.

The amount of traffic generated by these sites as well as the range of locations used to host and register them indicates the complexity in finding a solution to the global problem of online piracy and counterfeiting.

Global piracy affects a wide range of digital content, including movies, music, games, software, television shows and e-books while the trade in counterfeit goods online touches almost every item, including apparel, footwear, electronics, luxury items, sports merchandise and pharmaceuticals.

It is estimated that the annual worldwide economic impact of online piracy and counterfeiting reaches $200 billion.

Among the study s findings were that 67 percent of sites suspected of hosting pirated content and 73 percent of sites categorized as "counterfeit" were hosted in North America or Western Europe.

In previous test buys of prescription pharmaceutical products from some of these sites, MarkMonitor found that payment processing and order fulfillment took place in countries other than that used to host the site or register its domain name.

These findings demonstrate that while reliable infrastructure is a key factor for sites hosting piracy and counterfeit goods, many of these sites conduct business across multiple national boundaries.

"Online intellectual property - whether it is the sale of counterfeit shoes and fake drugs or the illegal distribution of movies, music, and software - steals jobs, threatens consumers, and hinders our economic growth," said Steve Tepp, senior director of internet counterfeiting and piracy for the Global Intellectual Property Center at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

"We have known for a long time that rogue websites, those dedicated to piracy and counterfeiting, were flourishing at our expense. Now we begin to see the staggering scope of this problem - more than 53 billion visits on rogue sites. And the MarkMonitor study is just the tip of the iceberg, identifying only a portion of the colossal amount of Internet traffic related to online counterfeiting and digital piracy. The study s findings underscore the urgency to address this epidemic in order to protect consumers, allow the legitimate Internet marketplace to flourish, and create jobs in America."

HP Says It Will Respond to the iPad on Feb. 9

HP recently sent out invitations to an event being held early next month, which reports say will be the unveiling of a tablet that runs Palm's webOS. Now it appears HP itself has confirmed that the "PalmPad" will debut that day.

In an interview with CNBC's Maria Bartiromo last Friday at CES (first pointed out by Pre Central, HP Executive Vice President Todd Bradley let slip what the February HP event

will be about. In a response to how a webOS tablet might differentiate itself from the iPad, he said, "You and I will talk about that on the ninth."

Bradley was almost certainly referring to the PalmPad, a webOS tablet that's been rumored to be in the works for some time. Fox News last month posted what it said were leaked specs and diagrams of the device, showing a tablet with a 9.7-inch screen, an HDMI output, and front- and rear-facing cameras. As webOS is also the operating system on the Palm Pre 2 smartphone, it's likely there will be new phones as well.

If the PalmPad is coming, it will face challenges on two fronts: 1) The dominant presence of the iPad in the tablet market and 2) A host of competitors vying for second place. More than 80 tablets were shown at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), the most promising being slates based on Google's upcoming tablet-specific OS, Android 3.0 "Honeycomb."

However, the tablet market has yet to mature,with the iPad almost a year old, there are opportunities to stand out before Apple brings to market its successor to the iPad, which is expected to come this spring.

WebOS, although popular with Palm Pre users, accounts for just 3.9 percent of the 61.5 million smartphones in the U.S., according to November numbers from ComScore.

Mozilla Firefox 4 Expected by Late February

Mozilla is almost ready to ship Firefox 4 and is working toward a late February release, Damon Sicore, Mozilla's senior director of platform engineering, said in a Tuesday note.

"We've worked tremendously hard on Firefox 4, and it's time to ship it," Sicore wrote to the developer mailing list. "We have to reach Release Candidate status as quickly as possible, ideally finishing the hard blockers by the beginning of February and shipping final before the end of February."

At this point, Mozilla has about 160 hard blockers - or bugs - to address. "Historically it has taken us six weeks to reach RC once we have 100 blockers left," Sicore wrote. "We must press hard now."

Those bug counts "demand another beta," he continued. "We'll drive the beta bugs to zero and ship another beta. If we can't get them to zero in

reasonable time, we'll repeat, deliberately."

Addressing these bugs is priority number one, he said, "since it pushes the rest of our schedule."

Sicore called on all developers for their input. "If you disagree with a blocking call, say so loudly. Do not be timid. This is your product, we need you to own it," he wrote.

Developers should not disable Flash, Silverlight, or other major plug-ins because Mozilla needs as many people as possible testing on these programs, Sicore said. Windows users also need to report instances of hardware acceleration causing crashes or other issues. "Don't just assume that someone else has filed a bug already," he said.

"Firefox 4 is gonna kick ass, and you should be fiercely proud of it," Sicore concluded.

Mozilla released Beta 8 of Firefox 4 in late December. It sported a trimmed-down user interface (as has been the trend started with Google Chrome and followed by Opera and IE9 beta), and made some significant internal changes, with a new add-in system, a faster JavaScript engine, and lots more HTML5 compatibility.

News Corp. Considering MySpace Sale

It's not a good week to be a MySpace employee. Just a day after it was announced that MySpace would lay off nearly half its staff, News Corp. admitted it's considering selling the site.

"News Corp is assessing a number of possibilities including a sale, a merger, and a spinout," Rosabel Tao, a spokesperson for Myspace, told Bloomberg. "The process has just started."

Chief executive Mike Jones delivered the news to employees on Wednesday at a company-wide meeting about MySpace's future.

On Tuesday, the former social-networking behemoth announced it would cut its staff by 47 percent. News Corp. famously bought MySpace in 2005 for $580 million, but it hasn't exactly been a cash cow for the media company. In the last quarter, the segment of News Corp. that owns MySpace lost $156 million . The layoffs, which affect about 500 people, were expected, however, especially as executives had called the losses "not acceptable" in November.

Jones placed the layoff's in context of the site's October redesign, which he also attempted to portray as a sign of the company's positive direction.

According to Bloomberg, if a spinoff is the solution to MySpace's woes, News. Corp will help fund the venture. News Corp. would take a more "entrepreneurial" approach to MySpace, brining in partners, privatizing, and offering stock options to employees.

"We're considering a number of strategic options for the business," News Corp. spokesperson Julie Henderson said.

Bloomberg said that News Corp has appointed Jack Kennedy, executive vice president of its digital media group, to deal with potential MySpace buyers.

Facebook Denies Shutdown Rumors

A rumor Facebook was shutting down wafted over the Web, forcing the hugely popular social network to deny it had any intention of closing.

The rumor was started by a satirical online website whose other news flashes include such items as "Alien Spaceships to Attack Earth in 2011" and "George Clooney Running for President."

As unlikely as it would seem that the social network with more than 500 million members would shut down, the rumor spread rapidly on Twitter and on Facebook itself.

Facebook denied it was shutting down in a statement posted on... Facebook.

"We didn't get the memo about shutting down, so we'll keep working away like always. We aren't going anywhere; we're just getting started," it said.

Web Filters Not 100% Foolproof Against Risky Sites

A European Internet study has an instant message for parents who want to control their children's online habits: web filters are not 100 percent foolproof against harmful sites.

A solid 84 percent of programmes restrict access to websites such as porn pages, according to a study released by the European Commission on Thursday.

But they still leave a 20 percent chance for sites with content unsuitable for children - webpages promoting anorexia, suicide and self-mutilation - to escape the filters.

The study also found that few Internet filters can block "Web 2.0" content including blogs, forums and social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, or filter out instant messaging services.

For parents whose web-savvy kids use smart phones or video game consoles to access the Internet, not all products on the market provide parental controls for such platforms.

Computers are no longer the only way to go online: 31 percent of children access the Internet with their phones and a quarter through platforms such as the Nintendo Wii or Sony's PlayStation, the study found.

A survey released in parallel to the study found that only a quarter of parents in the European Union use parental control software to monitor, track or filter online content.

The use of such software varies widely among parents in the 27-nation

EU, from 54 percent in Britain to nine percent in Romania.

The EUKidsOnline survey was conducted in 25 countries with more than 25,000 children and one of their parents between April and August 2010.

The study on filtering software analysed 26 parental control tools for PCs, three for game consoles and two for mobile phones.

The goal is to give parents an "objective view" of which softwares is the most effective, said Jonathan Todd, spokesman for European digital agenda commissioner Neelie Kroes.

"Protecting children from unsuitable content on the internet is of course an important issue," said Jonathan Todd, spokesman for European digital agenda commissioner Neelie Kroes.

"We want people in general, parents and children, to feel confident when they use the Internet," he said.

The study was funded by the EU's Safer Internet Programme, an initiative aimed at informing parents and children about the Web's potential risks.

The 2009-2013 programme has a budget of 55 million euros and will fund a review of parental control software every six months until the end of 2012.

The programme's website provides two lists ranking the effectiveness of the 26 software programmes for children 10 years old and younger and those over 11 years old.

Apple's Mac OS X topped both lists while rival Microsoft's Windows Vista was second for children under 10 and in ninth place for those over years old.

The list and full report are available at http://www.yprt.eu/sip/

Rogue Virus Testers Delude Consumers

If you haven't yet encountered a rogue antivirus ("scareware") program, it's probably because your existing antivirus software protected you from it. These programs prey on consumers who know they need protection but don't know enough to distinguish the real thing from a scam. If you take the bait you've got fake protection instead of real protection, and the bad guys have your credit card.

We've explained how you can avoid rogue antivirus tools. A post on Virus Bulletin's blog by Kaspersky Lab researcher Costin Raiu suggests that rogue antivirus testers pose a new but similar type of threat. Their web sites promote the idea that no security software can really protect you, says Raiu. Where scareware promotes a false sense of security, these rogue testers promote a false sense of insecurity. Each consumer who declines renewing an antivirus subscription is a win for the rogue testers.

Raiu lists a number of characteristics of these rogue testers. They lack affiliation with any legitimate testing organization such as the AMTSO (Anti-Malware Testing Standards Organization). They publish limited free reports but charge a high price for full reports. Charts in the free

reports may contain "amusing mistakes". The reports conclude that all antivirus products are useless. And the price to get full information about testing methodology is deliberately set so high that nobody will pay it.

I have not personally encountered sites fully matching this description, but I've definitely seen "shill" sites that use fancy charts and false data to promote rogue antivirus products. One rogue actually manipulates the victim's Internet connection so that a search for info about the product lands on a fake (and very positive) review. In fact it's a copy of one of my own reviews, attributed to me, with the product name changed. I've also run across test sites whose badly-written text is reminiscent of the previous generation of scareware. I don't doubt that full-scale rogue virus tester sites exist.

How do you avoid getting fooled? Kaspersky's Raiu says "I recommend sticking to established testing organizations such as Virus Bulletin, AV-test.org and AV-Comparatives or reputable magazines with a good history behind them". I couldn't agree more. You can start your search right here at PCMag.com.

Spam Traffic Returns After Holiday Break

Spammers are people too, apparently. They want to take a vacation to spend quality time with families over the traditional holiday break just like everyone else. Or, at least that is the way that it appears if you follow the trends in spam traffic.

Spam volume dropped precipitously and inexplicably as of December 25. According to blog posts from both Symantec and Proofpoint, spam dropped to virtually zero beginning Christmas day and continued at that pace until this week. As of January 9, spam is once again alive and well.

The Symantec blog outlines the scenario, "On December 25, 2010, Rustock, the largest of the spam botnets, went quiet. Why this happened, we don't know but what we do know is that global spam levels dropped massively as a result. MessageLabs Intelligence analysts did not expect this respite to last, and sadly we were right."

Meanwhile, the Proofpoint blog expresses very similar sentiments. "As they say, all things come to an end and, as expected, the unusual lull in spamming activity between Christmas and the new year seems to have come to an end early today."

Proofpoint describes the resurgent spam content. "The messages here still seem pretty heavy on pharma spam, but there are a few items that are possible phish, also a larger number of Asian language messages."

What does that mean for you? Well, it means that the spam purveyors apparently gave the world a holiday gift in the form of a brief respite from the constant deluge of pointless, and often malicious e-mails. But, it also means that the death of spam was too good to be true, and that it is still too soon to be scrapping your anti-spam defenses.

Thankfully, most PC spam filtering tools do at least an adequate - if not admirable - job of identifying and blocking spam messages. I probably receive a hundred or more spam e-mails per day, but it's rare that any

of them make it to my Inbox. As long as they get caught and redirected to the Junkmail folder, all is well and I can simply delete the contents of the folder and go on with life.

On smartphones and tablets, however, spam filtering is much less mature - if it exists at all. On both my iPhone and my iPad, e-mail messages that are filtered to Junkmail on my PC end up cluttering the Inbox because there is no spam filtering capability for these devices. One solution is to switch to Web-based e-mail such as Google’s Gmail which has robust spam filtering features built in.

I guess we should just be thankful for the holiday break, and keep our fingers crossed that the spammers have big plans for spring break as well.

U.S. Still Top Spammer

At the end of 2010, the United States remained on top of the "Dirty Dozen" list of spam relaying nations compiled by IT security firm Sophos.

While the list, which is complied on a quarterly basis, remains largely unchanged from the previous period, the spam being spewed from the list’s members has become increasingly more dangerous.

"Traditional subject matter such as adverts for pharmaceuticals continue to be a concern, with some 36 million Americans reported to purchase drugs from unlicensed online sellers - but more and more messages are spreading malware and are attempting to phish user names, passwords and personal information," Sophos said in a statement.

It also noted that there has been an increase in focused phishing attacks, known as spearphishing, on consumers, as well as reports of malicious apps, compromised profiles, and unwanted messages being spread across social networks like Facebook.

"Spam is certainly here to stay, however the motivations and the methods are continuing to change in order to reap the greatest rewards for the spammers," Sophos Senior Technology Consultant Graham Cluley said. "What’s becoming even more prevalent is the mailing of links to poisoned web pages - victims are tricked into clicking a link in an email, and then led to a site that attacks their computer with exploits or attempts to implant fake anti-virus software."

The top three spam relayers in the list remained unchanged from the August to September quarter. The United States was responsible for nearly one in five junk messages circulating the Internet and hosted 18.83 percent of the spam relays around the globe, while India placed second with 6.88 percent and Brazil third with 5.04 percent.

Below the top three spammers, only the United Kingdom in the fifth slot with 4.54 percent of the relays, Romania at number 11 with 2.3 percent and Spain in the 12 spot with 2.24 percent preserved their positions from the previous period.

Both Russia and Italy rose in the ranks - Russia to number four (4.64 percent) from a seven last quarter and Italy to seven (3.17 percent) from 10.

Meanwhile France, Germany, South Korea and Vietnam all fell in the table - France (3.45 percent) to sixth from fourth, Germany (2.99 percent) from sixth to ninth, South Korea from seventh to eighth and Vietnam (2.79 percent) to tenth from ninth.

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